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THE PORCELAIN OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

HIRSCHVOGEL. — HENRI II WORKS. — PALISSY

By JACOB FALKE.

Under the title "Porcelain of the sixteenth century" we purpose to include, and subject to a general disquisition, three groups of German and French workmanship of this class, which, although they certainly have salient points of difference, are both perfectly distinct in their style and history, as well as in other particulars, from the great and celebrated group of the Italian majolicas.

It might have been expected that, in its all conquering propaganda to the north of the Alps, the Italian Renaissance would have made its direct influence felt even in this province of art, and that the same zealous ardor of imitation, which was excited two hundred years later by the discovery of European porcelain, would have given rise to numerous manufactories or establishments for the production of articles in the majolica style, and afforded occupation to hundreds of a high order of mechanics. But this was not the case, at least, in any great degree. To the north of the Alps there exist perhaps only three manufactories whose origin can be traced to the direct influence of the Italian majolicas; one in the Netherlands and two in France, namely at Nevers and Rouen. And even these, one of which, that of Nevers, certainly produced majolicas very similar to the Italian, did not achieve any great reputation or importance till in later times, when they abandoned the Italian style, and struck into a new path, to which they were stimulated by the Asiatic porcelains of the seventeenth century.

It is just those artistic productions in glazed terracotta which, at that period, were subjects of observation in Germany and France, or are now collected and prized by amateurs, which form a perfect contrast to the Italian majolicas by their originality, and by the different circumstances under which they were produced.

The manufacture of Italian majolicas, though ob-

scure in its origin, soon became the favorite fosterchild of many a princely Mæcenæ, and quickly developed itself into a most extensive and flourishing branch of industry, so that individual artists, however excellent they might be, had much difficulty in bringing forward, with any advantage to themselves, their own artistic peculiarities. The case was different in Germany and France. There this branch of earthenware manufacture, so far as it may be considered an art, was entirely limited to a few names of importance, or its productions were so peculiar that they have become almost an enigma to us, and the veil that hangs over their origin has scarcely been raised a single inch. The history of the majolicas, since the time that princely patronage adopted them, is simple and clear, though we may not be able to ascribe to every single manufactory all that proceeded from it, and with those few names which meet us north of the Alps, we stand, it may be said, in the very midst of the romance of the sixteenth century, with all its restlessness, its eagerness for adventure, its desire of novelty and its spirit of inquiry.

A worthy son of this sixteenth century, this period when the world was, as it were, leaving its old grooves, and rebuilding itself out of its former ruins, stood forth in the person of Augustin Hirschvogel of Nuremberg, the son of a glass painter, himself also of the same trade, a man skilled in every art but contented with none. Born at Nuremberg in 1503, or according to other accounts in 1488, he commenced his artistic career under the auspices of his father, Veit Hirschvogel, whose works are still among the most celebrated ornaments of Nuremberg. Augustin soon surpassed his father and brother, the younger Veit, in their art, and enriched the technic of glass painting by discoveries of his own. He effected

great improvements in the method of burning the glass; was an especially clever designer, and surpassed every one of his time in his enamels. He had also a good knowledge of music, like his elder contemporary Leonardo, whom he equalled in the variety of his acquirements, if not in his grandeur of style. All this, however, did not satisfy his restless spirit; he found himself "cabinéd, cribbed, confined" in his native city by the petty pedantry of the retail business system which has always prevailed there. Abandoning therefore his prospects at home, he joined himself to a potter and determined to seek his fortune in Venice. There he settled, became naturalised and married, but was obliged, we are informed, to learn anew from its very first beginning, the mechanical work of the founder and enameller. Probably this refers to Venetian glass manufacture principally, but he perfected himself in pottery also at Venice by observation and study of the majolicas, although the Venetian factory, properly so called, was not at that time established. How long he remained in Venice is not known, but when sufficiently stored with knowledge and enriched by experience, he returned to Nuremberg and at once commenced and continued his works in enamelled terra cotta. Some of his stoves, vases and statues, were of such perfection that they seemed cast in metal. In Nuremberg he met with much opposition from the jealousy of the guild of potters, who endeavoured to put down the new style of workmanship; but he was protected in its exercise by the town council, a circumstance which seems to prove that his work was looked upon more in the light of an art than as a mere trade. He soon however became disgusted with this kind of work, and after having made some attempt at heraldic engraving, he emigrated once more, leaving his entire business to his colleagues. King Ferdinand had become acquainted with him at Nuremberg, and invited him to Vienna. Here he settled in 1530, though according to other authorities he was still in Nuremberg in 1543. Even in Vienna he found no rest, but travelled about in all directions through the hereditary possessions of Ferdinand as well as in Hungary and Transylvania, for the purpose of exercising a new branch of industry which he had adopted, having taken up geography and cartography, etching and engraving portraits, escutcheons and landscapes. At the same time he published a book on geometry and perspective, and even found leisure to write a religious work, a Concordance and Comparative View of the Old and New Testaments. At length, in the year 1553, this versatile but unquiet spirit found its repose in death.

The portion of Augustin Hirschvogel's varied activities which are of the greatest interest to us, in connexion with our present subject, are his enamelled terra cotta works. It is a question whether he acquired this art on his first visit to Italy, or whether he had not already practised it in Nuremberg, continued to do so in Venice, and perfected it under the influence of the majolicas. The latter supposition is probably the more correct one; for it is certain that, before his journey into Venice, he had become acquainted with enamelling

beyond any other artist of his time, that is, as far as relates to earthenware; for Augustin was no goldsmith, and copper enamelling was not practised in Nuremberg at that time. Pottery, on the other hand, had long before reached a certain point of art, and glazed stoves, ornamented with figures and coats of arms in relief, were contemporary with the first period of the majolicas, and were even produced at an earlier period from the workshops of Nuremberg. Even varicolored works are found among them from the very beginning of the sixteenth century, as may be seen by many well preserved specimens to the present day.

It would be difficult for us now to determine with any degree of precision how much of this art he took with him to Venice, or how much he acquired there and reintroduced into Nuremberg. Thus much however is certain, that the enamelled terra cotta works which were produced in his Nuremberg establishment after his return from Venice are entirely different from the Italian majolicas, and have a just claim to originality and peculiarity of style. They consist of vessels of different sorts, large pots, pitchers and flasks, all distinct from the Italian works both in form and coloring, and also in their being more profusely ornamented with reliefs, the characteristic feature being neither color nor design. The execution of these reliefs, which consist of ornaments in genre figures, or in Saints and Apostles is comparatively rough and German in style. The Apostles are generally represented under rounded arches surrounding the vessel, an arrangement which never occurs in the Italian works of this period, and dates in Germany from the middle ages. The contour also of the Italian productions is undoubtedly more delicate, freer and more graceful, and displays a higher artistic spirit. We do not intend to deny that the German specimens proceed from a genuine art period and an artistic hand, but they are coarser and clumsier than their Southern rivals. Where they surpass the latter, if this be deemed a superiority, is in their variety of color. Hirschvogel's works show colors and shades of color which are unknown to the majolicas, and for this reason have always been sought after as ornaments for rooms, and sideboards, and are now more highly esteemed than ever. It is certainly difficult to say which, of all the objects called Hirschvogel style, really proceeded from the hand and workshop of this artist, as they bear no particular mark, and the manufacture of them continued for some time after the death of their originator, till they were superseded by a change of taste.

If the German majolicas as they are sometimes termed of Hirschvogel and his successors have an entirely independent character, the French faience of the same period has a still better claim to originality. Especially is this the case with two distinct kinds of pottery, which are still held in high favor by amateurs and collectors, and have proved their importance in the reform of modern earthenware. These are, first, the articles generally termed Henri II work, after the king of that name in whose time they came into notice; and secondly, the

works of Bernard Palissy. Both of these are not only highly original in character, but may be almost termed enigmatical phenomena, charming us equally by their origin, their technic, and their artistic importance.

The so-called Henri II works, which as being first in point of time, are naturally to be first noticed, have been, to this very day, so great a mystery, that they have been called the Sphinx of art amateurs. Never mentioned by any historian at the time of their first appearance; unobserved for the space of three hundred years; their origin wrapt in the greatest obscurity, they have in our day acquired such value that £ 1200, or even £ 2400 have been known to have been given for single pieces which seem to be nothing more than small earthenware vessels of the commonest material. To this enormous evaluation, hitherto unheard of in the annals of dilettantism, the very small number of these articles now in existence, and their mysterious origin have doubtless greatly contributed, but still more perhaps, the shifting fashion of dilettantism, which, in its revolutions, has again taken up faience; while we cannot but allow that the artistic interest which attaches to them is far from insignificant.

It is about thirty years ago that a writer on archæology and art in Rouen, Pottier by name, drew attention to these till then unknown articles, of which he could then only enumerate four and twenty specimens. At present not more than sixty are known to exist, all of which are in the possession of English or French connoisseurs or are in some collection. Their style is so peculiar, so fundamentally different from all other porcelain of the time, that there can never be any hesitation in pronouncing an object to be of the Henri II style or not. This peculiarity is moreover so exclusive that they are collected without the slightest fear of mistake, and immediately referred to the same origin.

The uses for which these articles are destined are of various kinds; there are goblets or beakers with covers, pitchers, cans, salvers, pilgrims' flasks, salt-cellars, candlesticks, and kettle-shaped basins with spouts and handles, and many other articles for domestic use, especially for the table. As to their outline, their form is in part simple but in part also very rich and complicated; but even the simpler specimens give most unquestionable testimony to the artistic intention that has prevailed in their formation. To these simpler vessels belong especially the goblets and shallow cups in which a noble play of profile may be observed, and of which it almost seems that the Venetian drinking glasses had been the prototype. In the complicated objects the artistic efforts rise to such an extraordinary height that they lose sight of the capabilities of the material, and pass into the style of a closer and more ductile one. The clay is treated like one of the noble metals, and permits every kind of curve and bend, and even the sharpest edges and most delicate articulations. Many of the articles seem to go too far in this direction, and fall into the category of the Rococo and bizarre. Most peculiar in this respect

are the spouts of the flasks, which are excised and rolled up like paper, a treatment of the material never attempted in the majolicas, even in the most Rococo specimens.

The difference between these two porcelains, the Henri II and the Italian majolicas, is highly instructive for us. The glazed earthenware, in which the deepest parts are filled up with enamel, and the edges rounded off, does not admit of the same delicacy and richness of finish in outline and profile as the nobler metal does, which, whether wrought, cast, or engraved lends itself easily to any artistic design. The glazed terra cotta therefore is of simpler profile, nobler in the play of its flowing lines, and avoids all the sharper articulations or the more delicate and deeper cavities. Indeed it is just those qualities which are peculiar to metals and in which they excel that the Henri II porcelain emulates, while the majolicas avoid them, and limit themselves to a style best adopted to their material. Consequently, the Henri II work is almost as thin as metal; some parts are deeply undercut and even excavated, and their cavities filled up with rounded ornaments.

The originator of these works however has not contented himself with heaping up numerous excrescences one above the other, alternating the spherical with the angular, and deep incisions with prominent projections; he has added also relief ornaments in great abundance, having apparently but little, if any correspondence with the form, consisting chiefly of tragic and comic masks, shells and festoons, less frequently of the acanthus leaf, still more rarely of frogs, crabs, snails, salamanders and other animals: but also of consoles, caryatides, heads, and naked figures in which so little attention is paid to consistency that human heads are sometimes employed for the base. The figures are indeed not badly designed, but they impress us with the idea that they all came out of the same mould, and afterwards, while the material was still soft, had their arms bent and their legs twisted and their place assigned to them.

In the use of these figure ornaments there is much of the Rococo style: still more in the manner in which architecture is dragged in as an aid to the structure of some of the vessels. To round specimens, for example, are united columns or pillars, connected with them only in a few points, and neither bearing nor sustaining anything. The connexion indeed is as artificial as possible. Salt-cellars of three or six-sided prisms, surmounted by a kind of cup, are of a somewhat architectonic structure, each side being placed between two pillars which flank a window-like niche, having an arabesque ornament in place of colored glass. This would-be window is usually crowned with round arches, but in one specimen it is perfectly gothic in construction, with tracery and mullions. In another triliteral salt-cellar the sides of the façade resemble a church of the Renaissance period with low triliteral gables. The imitation of architecture is here carried out in miniature beyond any thing that has been attempted in chests and cabinets.

(To be continued in the next number.)